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## BOOK PUBLISHING

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In the book publishing business, as in all other commercial pursuits, there have appeared men who, with very little education, have become leaders and have amassed considerable fortunes, men who never saw the inside of a college, and who had little schooling. Such men are so gifted that, whatever falls to their lot, they are bound to succeed. What effect a finished education would have had on them and their career is a problem which may be left to conjecture. It is safe to say that men who have risen without an education are by far the exception. And most of them will confess that they would be thankful 'f they had received the education of their more fortunate associates.

There is no "commercial profession" where a finished education is more useful than that of publishing. The very nature of the business, which is practically that of preserving and disseminating knowledge and entertainment, is fascinating to a degree. To feel that an imprint on an important book will pass under the eyes of generations, after monuments have become neglected, is a satisfaction which the publisher of a good book may properly enjoy in prospective. Indeed, the very name and nature of the profession suggest culture, and without an appreciation of the higher ideals of life the publisher lacks an important, if not essential, quality to success.

The publishing business is divided into special branches, distinguished broadly by the nature of the books which they individually include. Thus we have medical publishers, technical or scientific publishers, publishers of belles lettres and fiction, and publishers of periodicals. The firm or individual issuing books belonging to all or several of these various classes is known as a general publisher. The choice of a particular department of publishing is de-

pendent upon the inclination or training of the individual. And so likewise each branch of publishing demands a special education or experience in keeping with its character.

But as a basis for successful publishing, in any or all of its branches, a common school education or its equivalent is a *sine qua non*. After that, the temperament and tastes of the individual probably are the most influential factors in determining a choice. If he has the clearly defined desire to confine his work to the law, to medicine, or to architecture, and seems to possess the physical and mental qualifications which fit him for dealing with any one of these, it is worse than useless to attempt to turn him aside from his desire. Such a young man is hardly likely to be successful in commercial pursuits; both his inclination and his mental equipment influence him to regard business as nothing more than a means to an end. On the other hand, the boy who possesses what might be termed a commercial temperament and who combines with this a taste for literature is, other things being equal, decidedly the best subject from which to develop a successful publisher. A purely literary temperament may fit him to become a writer, but, of itself, is not sufficient to equip him to be a publisher. Business acumen must be in his make-up, or he will ultimately fail.

At the close of his school life a boy should be in a position to select for himself, or to have selected for him by some one who thoroughly understands him, the special course of preparation which will fit him for the occupation he intends to follow, and, if he wishes to be a publisher, to advise him wisely with regard to that business.

Let us suppose that his intention is to become a medical publisher. In this case his first step, after leaving school, should be to enter a medical college of good standing. At first thought, this suggestion may seem altogether out of place. The young man may perhaps ask, "Why do I need to learn how to treat sick people when my plan is to publish books for those who already know more about this sort of thing than I could ever expect to learn?" "Exactly so," his adviser will reply. "But you must know how medical subjects are presented to students in order that you may be able to recognize what is needed in the way of a book intended to meet the requirements of medical students, professors and practitioners. Consequently, you must at first put yourself in

the position of the student and professor, and so understand their point of view. Furthermore, by this means you form acquaintances with those of authority in medical circles. This results in connections which, in your business career, should prove to be of great value, both by giving you special opportunities to procure the books you wish to publish, and also by enabling you, at times, to secure information or advice which will be needed."

The medical book business is a rather peculiar one in that it requires men especially trained for its management, and a man once trained to its methods may hardly be expected to be a success in the handling of other lines of books.

It might be thought that, to fit one to become a publisher of technical or scientific books, a special preparatory course of study in technical schools was likewise necessary; but this is not the case. The medical publisher concerns himself directly with one clearly defined class of books. The technical or scientific publisher, on the other hand, has to do with subjects so numerous and diversified in character as to make anything more than a general intelligent understanding of them and of their likely appeal, an impracticability. A publisher of technical or scientific works is not expected to know, nor would it be possible for him to speak authoritatively from first hand knowledge of, the exact value of each and every one of the books which he publishes. He must rely for his decisions on these points — so far as the manuscripts offered him or solicited for publication are concerned — upon the judgment of those whom he knows to have a special understanding of the particular subject in hand. It is not meant to imply that a scientific training is not of usefulness to the technical publisher. It *is* of decided value because of the habit of mind and the point of view which it establishes. But it cannot be considered essential.

After the student has acquired sufficient knowledge from institutions which deal with the higher education, his next step is to come to an understanding of how that education may best be applied to the business which he is about to undertake. We will suppose that he already has entered upon the publishing business, and that he has in prospect, or perhaps already on his shelves, a few good books which it is his business to sell. How shall he do this?

The first thought is by advertising. What form should this take? At college he knows that the books generally employed by

the students have been those "adopted," as it is called, by the professors. This adoption is one of the first things which he desires to secure for *his* medical books. And for that purpose he must obtain the services of competent agents or train them in methods which will result in presenting the books properly to the most likely purchasers. Also these agents must be handled by a man who understands the systematizing of an agency's work, and the careful recording of all facts and figures relating to it. For this purpose a very complete equipment is necessary; and it is not long before our publisher, considering the questions already raised, and the many little details involved by them, realizes that there are tremendous difficulties confronting the man who attempts to compete with the wealthy and established publishing houses.

The situation outlined, however, is offered rather as an illustration of the necessity for thorough preparation on the student's part than as a disturbing picture of conditions. The fact is that an experience of some length in the service of a large publishing house is essential to success. In this way and in this way only may be acquired that knowledge of the application of education to business which will later enable the ambitious publisher to make the best use of his opportunities and of his capital—whether it be in dollars and cents or in brains.

The school of experience is the only positive and safe school from which to graduate into the ranks of independent publishers. For only in that school can be gained acquaintance with practical problems of the business—problems which vary so considerably in their nature and bearings as to make impossible their presentation in the college or technical school. It is the unforeseen which usually demoralizes the beginner. Experience teaches him to prepare for such things ahead of time. And the unforeseen is a factor of daily experience, it is not touched upon in books or lectures.

On the other hand, as the graduate of a college or professional school, the young man who is being trained in a publishing house finds himself equipped to do many things which his less educated rival cannot do so readily. The college trained man already has a fairly broad and intelligent understanding of the best literature; he can talk rationally of the contents of books and their merits; he can approach the writers of books with that air of understanding which contributes to making them feel that he is one of them. Altogether

he has a good start, and, with equal capacity and energy, his chances for success are very much better than those of his less educated competitor.

The "general" publishing business involves such a variety of problems, that any special education in one department of learning is rather more apt to be disadvantageous than otherwise to the man who contemplates taking up this business. Furthermore — and this is true of all branches of publishing — youth is tremendously helpful. The young man's mind is open and eager, his ambitions make it easy for him to perform duties in the publishing house which, as an older man he might resent. The business requires physical energy and alertness of mind; furthermore as a young man the beginner in the publishing house more readily acquiesces in the all-important rule "Learn to obey in order that you may learn to command." There is little favoritism in the publishing business. Ability figures too largely in the final result to permit of overlooking it.

There is still another reason why the man ambitious to become a publisher should first of all have experience as an employee in an established house, and have this experience while he is yet young. The administrative faculty is, in a considerable degree, a gift which is not shared by all men. But it can be cultivated, and something which will serve tolerably well in its place may be acquired by close observation of those who do possess it, and by applying the results of this observation with common sense. In a large house a vast deal of administrative ability is required. While each department is presided over by a head, there are still constant issues involved by the work of each of these departments which must come for decision before the general head of the business. Again, there must be constant watch on the part of this head over the operations of the concern. The young man who is employed in a publishing house sees and hears every day what is the result of applied executive capacity and of the organization of which that capacity is the product. Consequently, whether or not he has an aptitude for the management of affairs, he must, as time goes on, store up a certain fund of information which stands him in good need. And not the least of the lessons which he so learns is that a knowledge of human nature — of the capacity, qualities, and temperament of men — is of the first importance in arranging the personnel of an establish-

ment which to do its best must run as does a fine piece of machinery, every part of it doing its duty continuously, quietly, and without friction. Such knowledge enables the publisher to advise his salesmen and intelligently weigh the opinions of those who read his manuscripts for him. In the case of the salesman it enables him to decide upon the particular classes of people who may be reached most profitably by the publications of the house. In the case of the readers of manuscripts it enables him to gauge the qualities of a manuscript and determine whether it is likely to interest the readers for whom it is intended.

Probably the most difficult problem confronting the publisher to-day is the selection of a novel which shall prove "popular." Fiction is the most widely known form of writing at the present time. More people attempt to write stories than anything else; and more people read them. It might almost be said that at least one in every two of the educated people born in the last one hundred years at one time or another has tried his or her hand at what is known as imaginative writing. Masses of such productions never even get as far as the publisher, and remain in their authors' desks. Tons of novels are returned yearly by publishers to their writers as being unavailable for publication. The magazines alone publish an immense amount of fiction; and almost as much if not more appears in the form of books. Consequently, the competition on the part of authors to get into print is acute, and a publisher has to employ every resource of his experience and judgment, as well as exercise extreme caution in deciding just which of the contributions offered to him he can publish to advantage.

Perhaps in the choice of a novel, the factor which may be counted on most surely is the curiosity common to us all. If a book succeeds in its early pages in piquing this curiosity and keeps it alive until near the close it is pretty sure to find a great many readers. Given such a story in which the actors are presented so that we sympathize with them or yield them our respect; in which our emotions are touched, and so constructed that it moves to a logical end, through incidents which have their own individual interest — given such a story, the publisher may put it upon the market with fair assurance of success. The great defect of some novels which have a really good idea at their foundation is what is called "padding" — that is to say, the extension of events beyond all reasonable

length, and the amplification of descriptions and conversations to the point where the reader loses interest through sheer monotony.

Exactly how a publisher arrives at his decision with regard to the availability of a manuscript is not easy to say in so many terms. A variety of reasons, differing with almost every book, enter into his judgment; but, in general, he has to consider,—the individual and comparative opinions of those who have read the manuscript, and to weigh these against his own views. Also he must ask himself to which sex the novel would be likely to appeal most strongly; in what part of the country it probably would have its largest sale, and how much of a sale a conservative estimate would predict for it. And when all this has been gone over he must again review his experience in the light of that unpleasant but undeniable fact that another previous book which perhaps seemed to him practically certain of a big sale was, commercially regarded, a complete failure. And what is still more discouraging, he must reflect that, for the failure of that particular book, he very probably is able to give no definite and sufficient reason even now. For one cause or another the public refused to talk about it, and, for all his advertising and the energetic efforts of his salesmen, it did not sell.

The whole question of popularizing novels seems to demand something more than literary judgment and business instinct. It might almost be said to involve complex psychic factors. At least the success of some books points to nothing more or less than this.

The selection of standard works as they are called—that is to say, books of reference, history, biographies, is quite another matter. The results achieved in these lines are dependent first of all upon the inherent merits of the work itself, and these in turn are referable in large part to the plan of the work and to the qualities of the man who is charged with preparing it. He is generally a specialist, and the publisher gives him considerable latitude in carrying out the plan of the book. The publisher's particular problems in each case are worked out along the lines of common sense regulated by the scheme of the work determined upon in advance. And this last in turn is drawn up with the idea of meeting the wants of the particular class of people for which the work is intended.

Histories and biographies are treated very similarly so far as their writing and the relation of publisher to author are concerned. And the method by which they are sold is also very much



like that adopted in other books of serious interest. But the whole problem of selling is one calling for the most discriminating judgment, and the widest experience. The selling plan varies in detail at least with almost every separate book, if we except fiction. The novel invariably is placed upon the market through the medium of book stores and by the regular salesmen of the publisher. Books of belles lettres and science are sold in that way too; but they are also occasionally sold by what is known as "subscription." The first mentioned method is called "selling to the trade," and the books so treated are called "trade books," as distinguished from "subscription books" which are sold exclusively by agents directly to the customer and so do not come into the hands of the retail bookseller at all.

The publisher has to decide in advance which will be the more profitable way for him to put his book upon the market, and his choice depends, not only upon the character of the book itself, but also upon the readers to whom he expects to sell it. If he believes that it should appeal especially to mechanics and others of those who are dependent upon their daily wages and to farmers who have a limited income, he remembers that books are a luxury to these people and that to induce them to purchase requires personal application, a full explanation by word of mouth of the merits of the book, and the persuasive tactics of a trained book agent. And here is where the book agent finds his fertile field. Cheap encyclopædias, Bibles, works on the farm, and on popular science, popular illustrated histories, or cheap editions of standard works of fiction may be presented to these customers with very good chances of success. But perhaps the easiest seller to such people is the life of a man who is in the nation's eye at the time. Such a book, if printed on cheap paper, profusely illustrated and showily bound, can be sold in large quantities, provided the price be low enough. But this branch of the subscription book business has peculiarities of its own, and the publisher who undertakes it usually has all that he can attend to without other publication business. No special academic education is required for success in this line. The ability to train agents for their tasks and to lay out their routes and otherwise govern their movements and doings are the requisites in a publisher of this kind.

The higher grades of subscription books which appeal to edu-

cated classes of readers require very different treatment. The subscription agent presenting these has to be better dressed and, in speech, manner and mental qualities, be not far inferior to those to whom he intends to present himself. He must know what the books he is selling are about and be able to answer questions in regard to their contents and their writer intelligently and promptly. In other words, in this branch of the trade, the tactics of the showman count for less, and education for far more.

Selling books by subscription is a more costly way than selling through the trade if the immediate expenses only be considered. The agent has to be paid a commission larger than is the discount usually allowed to the retail trade. Consequently, the net returns to the publisher are smaller on each copy of a subscription book than on each copy of a book sold to the trade. Purchasers, too, will sometimes return their books before they have paid for them, and after the agent has received his commission for selling them. This, of course, involves a direct loss to the publisher, and the books frequently come back in bad condition. Freight charges and the cost of collecting accounts also tend to cut down the publisher's profit. So, in order to provide against these heavy charges, the price of subscription books is often greater than that charged for other books which cost just as much to manufacture.

One of the most popular ways of selling subscription books is on what is known as the instalment plan, by which the subscriber is allowed to pay for the work he agrees to take in a number of installments. Sometimes these payments extend over two years, and extensive and very careful bookkeeping is required to cover the hundreds of small accounts. In this plan there is also a considerable loss of interest on receipts, while there always exists the danger of the subscriber being unable, or refusing, to keep up with his or her payments to the end, thereby involving the services of collectors. In my opinion, the instalment subscription business is an improper method of conducting what is otherwise a legitimate and profitable way of selling books.

Books sold by subscription are copiously advertised along special lines. This is done both in periodicals which enter the home, and by a process of circularization, which is more extensive than in any other branch of the book business. This advertising is not primarily intended to secure subscribers directly but to give material

to the publisher which he may turn over to his agents who then visit the writer and show him or her the book itself. Every sale so effected by the agent is credited to his account, and a commission allowed him on the sale. It must be remembered that this advertising deals only with books which cannot be procured in the book-stores, and on which, therefore, the agent is able to get the full publisher's price.

Most books, as has already been observed, are sold through the trade. The bookseller deals with the retail customer almost on his own terms. The salesmen employed by the publisher for this purpose are differently trained from those who carry on the subscription business. They have to do, not with men who do not know what they want and whose knowledge of books in many cases is limited; but with men equally well trained with themselves, and who know fairly definitely what they want and how many books they wish to buy. Books sold to the trade are advertised in a systematic manner in those mediums which are supposed to be read most widely by people interested in books. Most publishers follow convention in their advertising, confining themselves in general to a display of the title of the book advertised, and the name of the author, and publisher, together with such extracts from reviews upon the book or other opinions of its merits as they think will encourage purchase. The amount of advertising done is determined chiefly by what the publisher estimates as the possible sale for the book, and of how quickly and profitably it will respond to this sort of promotion. Some few publishers, however, particularly of recent years, have adopted quite a different policy and their advertising in the daily newspapers follows fairly closely the model set by promoters of patent medicines, and department stores.

Besides this sort of advertising there is another which, strictly speaking, is not advertising at all. This is done through the review columns which very many of the large daily papers, and some of the periodicals, have established as regular departments.

School book publishing is a business of its own, though conducted in some cases as a department of the general publishing business. School books include readers, spellers, arithmetics, geographies, physiologies, etc. The sale of such books depends largely upon the various school boards. Their selection usually results in a very large order generally calling for prompt delivery at a com-

paratively low price, and, consequently, an order of this kind is exceedingly gratifying and profitable to the publisher. The time and methods characterizing these "adoptions" — as the selections of the school board are called — differ in various states. The publisher usually delegates the actual solicitation to agents trained particularly for that sort of business. The members of the Board are usually interviewed. Some times "adoptions" result in sales of hundreds of thousands of a single work, though this also may extend over a period of from three to five years. Consequently the rivalry among the agents, as among the publishers, is keen and well worth the great expense attendant upon a campaign for adoption. It may be mentioned that as a provision of such adoptions, however, it is frequently necessary for the publisher of the successful book to take up and dispose of, on his own account, the copies of the book which his work has displaced. Moreover, during what is called the first term of its adoption the new book must be furnished by the publisher at a price lower than the figure which will be paid to him for it later on. This is called the introductory price. As guarantee of his good faith and ability to fill the order placed by the school board the publisher in every instance has to file a surety bond.

In one sense at least, because of its various complications, the school book business demands more intelligence, watchfulness and energy than any other branch of publishing. The books, too, must be well manufactured, both as to materials and artistic results, for they come under the closest of criticism and test, and every flaw, real or imaginary, is made the most of by competitors in the trade.

Poetry is the most disturbing form of literature presented to the general publisher's attention. Popular appreciation of poetry seems to be almost dead. This statement refers of course to the poetry written to-day; for an everlasting taste exists for the standard works of poetry, as is evinced by large annual sales of the numberless editions of these works. A few, a very few, of our living poets write what the publisher can issue with a fair hope of commercial profit; and one or two of them are yearly the authors of books which have what might almost be called a big sale. The books of poetry which succeed appeal to the emotional side of human nature, or deal with the pathos and humor of simple life; and, on the other hand, those poets who write of the profound or

the mystical seem not to be understood, or, at least, are not widely read. Such commercial success as has been achieved in this field seems rather the result of adventitious circumstances than the fruit of logical and sober judgment on the publisher's part.

In dealing with authors the publisher has only his own estimate of the manuscript and of the probabilities of its sale upon which to base his calculations of the price he should pay the author for the work. And this fact of course prohibits the fixing of any standard of compensation which might be applied to all cases. Moreover, the plan upon which any publication is to be issued has a great deal to do with the consideration to the author.

In those cases where the publisher prefers to own all rights in the printed form of the manuscript, and where the author is willing to allow this arrangement, a lump sum, agreed upon between the parties, is paid to the author, and his rights to the manuscript and to the books made from it from that time on cease, except of course the right to have his name placed upon the title page. Where a book has a very large sale such an arrangement is of course profitable to the publishers and less profitable to the author, since no continuous payments resulting from increasing sales accrue to the author. But quite another arrangement is usually followed. Payment is generally made to the author by the publisher upon what is known as the "royalty basis." That is to say, a certain percentage of the retail or wholesale price of the printed book is agreed upon, and, for each copy sold, the publisher credits the author's account with the amount due him. This may be ten, twelve and a half, fifteen, or, in very rare instances, twenty per cent.

Still another arrangement is that of a division of profits between the author and publisher. This is most often, perhaps, applied to publishing agreements on technical books; and by it, when all the expenses attaching to the manufacture and publication of the work have been met by returns from sales of that work, the net credits thereafter accruing are divided equally, a fixed charge agreed upon by both parties in advance being made for the manufacture of each copy of the book.

A fourth plan, which in reality is but a modification of the second arrangement, is that by which a royalty is paid to the author only after the expenses have been met, — these expenses being

reckoned and accounted for on the same plan as that employed in the half profit arrangement.

Authors occasionally have their books published for them at their own expense, in which case the publisher makes an estimate of the cost of producing and publishing the work and the author pays to him the amount involved, in such sums as are agreed upon. In this case the author generally retains the copyright and other interests in the book. It need hardly be said that where books are published at the author's expense it is almost always because the publishers cannot believe that they would be a profitable venture for him to undertake at his own risk. On the other hand, where what is known as "advance royalty" is paid by the publisher, it is because he (the publisher) thinks the book in question a very good commercial venture, and consequently is quite willing to advance to the author a stipulated sum, this sum to be deducted from the first royalties accruing to the author on account of the book. The payment of "advance royalty" has become more common of recent years owing to the competition among publishers for the work of a comparatively few very popular novelists; yet it remains a risk which many publishers regard as neither business-like, logical, nor reasonable under the very uncertain conditions attending the sales of novels.

The written agreements between authors and publishers with relation to the publication of books generally refer to the entire period during which a copyright and renewals upon any one work may be secured from Washington. After the expiration of this period any work becomes common property, and the publisher's exclusive interest in it from a legal point ceases. Consequently, any other publisher, after that time, may print the book without regard to the previous right of author and original publisher. To meet this competition the original publisher frequently has to bring out the book upon which copyright has expired in cheaper form, and, therefore, at a lower price.

The successful publication of periodicals is a problem toward the solving of which whole fortunes have been contributed frequently without profitable results. Some few publishers have been exceedingly accurate in their judgment of what the public wants, and their periodicals are consequently a commercial success almost from the start. The failures, however, outnumber the successes

one hundred to one. On the other hand, the few successes have been profitable not only because of the receipts they bring in directly, but also as advertising mediums for the house which published them; and it may be said that probably every publisher's ambition includes the issue of a periodical of large circulation and influential character.

The securing of such circulation is the very crux of the difficulty, but to explain exactly how a circulation is obtained would be impossible. Certain things are always done such as the wide advertising of the periodical, the distribution of sample copies wherever it is thought that they may interest readers who will later on become purchasers and a vigorous and widespread circularization by letters and prospectuses. But, aside from such general methods and securing the co-operation of the large distributing agencies, whatever is accomplished in the way of circulation results from the cleverness and energy of the circulation manager and from the ability and resources of the editor.

The profit to the magazine publisher in no case arises, however, from subscriptions to it or from its sales upon the news stands. The price usually asked for a copy of a magazine would not more than pay for the white paper, the labor, and the ink which enter into its making, to say nothing of the cost of the contributions it contains and the salaries paid its editors. It is from the advertising pages of the magazines that the publisher counts to make his profit. The business to-day indeed is at a point where only the most entertaining and informing of periodicals of the largest circulation can expect long to survive the struggle and continue to be commercially successful.

The advertising department has grown in importance at an astonishing pace. Advertising itself has attained to the dignity of an art. In fact advertising is the special subject of study in many schools throughout the country, and advertising men form a large profession, many members drawing high salaries. In book and magazine advertising that psychological understanding of what will arrest attention and encourage the reader to go through an advertisement is almost if not quite as important as in the advertising of medicine, groceries, or the wares of a department store. But less license in the matter of the wording and display of type is permitted in publishers' advertising than in other kinds because of

the greater dignity of books and bookmaking. This feeling may be more or less the result of tradition, nonetheless it persists; and the most widely respected publishing houses to-day in their advertising seldom go further than to make the most of the reputation of the author, the opinions of critics, and the special points of interest in the book advertised. Nor does advertising depend for its success upon the size of the advertisement. A five-line advertisement in agate type in a daily paper, if worded exactly as it should be, will accomplish more than a hundred lines carelessly phrased, or improperly presented in type.

Yet, when all is said and done, no amount of advertising, however clever, will push a poor book beyond a certain point. There must be in the work itself that which sustains the claim of the advertising and satisfies the reader's interest. If not, the publication will sell only until it is "found out." In other words, honesty and sincerity must characterize every move made in the promotion of a book from the advance work of the salesman to the phrasing of the advertising. Moreover, even when the publisher has done all this he can have no certainty of the results. There is probably nothing more necessary to the selling of any sort of goods to-day than liberal and clever advertising; there is no part of the publisher's business in which a larger amount of faith is needed. In very few instances is he able to tell what good, if any, a particular advertisement has accomplished — except, of course, in the advertising of those books which are not sold by the trade and orders for which consequently come directly to him from the reader of the advertisement. He can only go ahead, advertise to the best of his judgment and ability, and, if a profit results, continue his advertising as long as the general sales of the book seem to respond to that particular form of promotion. Advertising might well be called "bread upon the waters, but bread upon waters whose currents are almost uncharted." And not infrequently the item which wipes out whatever profit the publisher otherwise would have made upon a book as the results of sales is — the advertising.